

Remarks for Housing Committee

Thursday, Feb. 14, 2013

Charlotte T. Suhler, Darien, CT

Representative Butler, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Miller, Senator McKinney,
Distinguished members of the Housing Committee

I regret that I am unable to attend this rescheduled meeting, but hope that you will seriously consider these remarks.

I am Charlotte Suhler, a longtime resident of Darien and for about five years chaired the town's Affordable Housing Advisory Commission under First Selectwoman Evonne Klein. This Commission surveyed the town, initiated Inclusionary Zoning and our report was the basis of the Affordable Housing Plan for Darien. I am sending these remarks to oppose HB6041 and other legislation that would repeal the state's affordable housing appeals procedure.

It's interesting to look at the issues of housing and education, as they are certainly intertwined with the economy. If one sees a group of toddlers from an affluent town in Connecticut, it is easily projected that these young people will be less likely to drop out of school, struggle with dead end jobs or have trouble with the law. If we look at toddlers in an upper-middle-class neighborhood, it's a good bet that they will go on to college, buy nice homes and enjoy white-collar careers. Nick Kristoff, writer for the New York Times, recently referred to this as *Zip Code education*.

Yes, our kids have been given Head Start and other programs to bridge the educational achievement gap, but 8-30G has attempted to level this playing field by increasing the affordable housing in towns. Research has shown clearly that students who cannot only attend high-resource schools but also live in high resource communities see their reading and math scores rise and worlds of opportunity open to them.

While I would agree readily that individuals with less-than-pure motives have used the statute to try to enrich themselves—and thus it may be difficult to protect municipalities from proposals that aren't really meant to create much-needed housing for low- and moderate-income—the statute remains vitally important for three reasons:

1. To date 8-30G has produced thousands of units of housing for individuals and families that sorely need it. Connecticut has a huge supply problem: it is 50th in units built per capita from 2002-'11 and, thus, has the 6th highest rental costs and 8th highest home values in the nation. Forty-one percent spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing. This just doesn't work for the economy of the state.
2. Only 29 of our 169 municipalities have affordable housing stock that exceeds 10%. That means that our low- and moderate-income residents are mostly confined to those cities and towns, which also happen to be the municipalities with the most overburdened school districts and fewest community services.
3. Finally, I know the statute works. Quite honestly, Darien would not have created scores of affordable units in the last several years if the statute weren't pushing the town to create them. At the same time, the statute's moratorium provision allows the town a respite from 8-30G proposals if it makes progress in adding affordable units. Darien has done just that. In other words, 8-30G is valuable because it pushes towns to create affordable units, pressures towns that don't and rewards towns that do.

Please say no to those who would weaken it. It is working to provide opportunity to households that otherwise would have little.